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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

26 June 1985

Prince Sihanouk and the Cambodian Resistance Coalition:  
Will He Bolt?

Summary

Attempting to second-guess the unpredictable Prince Sihanouk has been a cottage industry of sorts among Indochina analysts for over 30 years. The Prince no longer cuts the swath he once did and has been forced to share the Cambodian stage with a number of more powerful players. But he remains a key figure--especially in the eyes of the international community--and is still capable of pulling off one of his patented "grand gestures" that could seriously complicate or even totally undermine ASEAN's current Cambodian strategy.

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Although Sihanouk's course over the years can indeed be characterized as mercurial and peripatetic, we believe his behavior has been shaped by a number of consistent and deeply held attitudes and instincts.

-- His strong preference for political rather than military solutions.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Office of East Asian Analysis, with contributions from [redacted] OCR and [redacted], and coordinated within the Directorate of Intelligence. Information available as of 26 June 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Southeast Asia Division, OEA, [redacted]

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-- His conviction that a Geneva-type international conference offers the best hope of guaranteeing Cambodian independence.

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Some of these characteristics suggest that Sihanouk will increasingly be tempted to cut a separate deal with a Vietnam-backed regime over the next year or two. He has become increasingly pessimistic that current resistance strategy will lead to a negotiated solution to the Cambodian problem.

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Accepting an accommodation with the Heng Samrin regime would be a difficult step for Sihanouk to take, and on balance we expect that he will stick with the resistance coalition for another six months or so. Sihanouk will continue to focus his efforts on bolstering diplomatic support for the coalition, in our view, while exploring beneath the surface various possibilities for a negotiated solution. But over the longer term, we believe there is a better than even chance that Sihanouk would be prepared to seek an independent deal with the Heng Samrin government, especially if Cambodian resistance military prospects do not begin to improve or if international support for his coalition government declines sharply.

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#### A Deepening Pessimism

Sihanouk is increasingly pessimistic about the likelihood of a political settlement for Cambodia. We believe he views the time frame for negotiations as narrowing.

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As recently as June, Sihanouk told the New York Times that the resistance faced a far superior Vietnamese force and he was "very, very pessimistic" about any military or diplomatic breakthroughs.

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Sihanouk and His Allies

Sihanouk's occasional flirtations with the Heng Samrin regime and his frequent use of resignation threats as political leverage have worsened the mutual distrust between the coalition

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factions.\* His relationship with Son Sann has historically been testy, in large part because the KPNLF leader refuses to pay homage to the Prince. Sihanouk's resignation threat last November was precipitated by anti-Sihanouk demonstrations in Minneapolis led by Son Sann supporters who blamed Sihanouk for the rise of Pol Pot. Relations between the two non-Communist factions deteriorated to the point that Sihanouk instructed his supporters to cease all military cooperation with the KPNLF. The incident ultimately required public reiterations of support from Son Sann and ASEAN intervention to resolve. [redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted] Sihanouk has also grown increasingly frustrated by restrictions imposed by China, Thailand, and his coalition partners on his efforts to explore political avenues for a settlement. [redacted]

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[redacted] At other times-- such as when Sihanouk proposed an international conference on Cambodia during his visit to Australia in February 1985--his allies have virtually ignored him. [redacted]

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We believe Sihanouk views these kinds of responses to his diplomatic maneuvering as personal slights. They either provoke threats to resign or bouts of brooding during which Sihanouk withdraws from an active role in the coalition. [redacted]

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\*Sihanouk has been the President and the most visible member of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) since it was formed in July 1982, after more than two years of negotiations between the three major resistance factions: Sihanouk's National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia; the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), led by Son Sann; and the deposed government of Democratic Kampuchea (DK or Khmer Rouge). [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

Sihanouk once again appears disgusted with his resistance partners for failing to support Malaysia's recent proposal for indirect negotiations, or "proximity talks," with the Heng Samrin regime. Sihanouk had publicly thrown his personal weight behind the proposal\*, but had to back down in the interest of coalition unity when his resistance partners--principally the Khmer Rouge--rejected the idea.

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#### The Prince's Next Moves

Despite his threats to bolt the coalition, we do not expect Sihanouk to abandon his position any time soon. Although Sihanouk's position as President of the CGDK is more titular than real, he retains a good deal of international prestige because of his position and we believe he enjoys seeing himself as the leader of international efforts to restore Cambodia's neutrality.

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As a result, we expect Sihanouk to focus his efforts in the next year on renewed diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving the crisis politically. He would like to see more diplomatic efforts by both China and the United States to restore Cambodian neutrality.

- [REDACTED] Sihanouk believes the United States can influence China to be more flexible and sees the United States as playing a key role in preventing a post-war resurgence of the Khmer Rouge.
- The Prince also believes the United States must act independently of ASEAN in order to exert influence on the Thai and get negotiations rolling.

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\*Sihanouk has a habit of sharing his personal views on Cambodia with the press--particularly on matters over which he has differences with his supporters in ASEAN, the CGDK or China. This frequently exacerbates coalition infighting.

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Sihanouk may also seek to engage France more directly in diplomacy in the region. France tried to play an intermediary role last fall in arranging the abortive meeting between Sihanouk and PRK Foreign Minister Hun Sen. Sihanouk may seek other avenues for indirect dialogue with the Heng Samrin regime during his visit to Paris later this year.

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### Crossroads Ahead

Although we cannot say precisely if or when Sihanouk might openly break with ASEAN and the resistance coalition, we believe a number of developments during the next few years could convince him that dealing with the Heng Samrin regime is his only way to influence Cambodia's future and limit Vietnamese control there.

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Apart from health factors, which may convince him that time is running out, the following events serve as potential indicators of an impending Sihanouk departure:

**Deteriorating or Ineffective Resistance Military Performance.** Although Sihanouk has recently been buoyed by press reports of improved military performance by the Sihanoukists.

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Since early June, the Vietnamese have begun military sweep operations that will make sustained guerrilla activity in the interior of Cambodia by the Sihanouk faction more difficult. Although we believe it will take several years for the resistance to demonstrate its capabilities on the battlefield, its failure to prove more than a nuisance to Vietnamese forces would increase the risks of Sihanouk leaving the coalition.

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Clashes between the Sihanoukists and the Khmer Rouge in the interior might also prompt Sihanouk to resign. The likelihood of such clashes will increase, in our view, if the Sihanoukists' military performance improves.

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**A Breakdown in International Support for the Resistance.** Significant weakening of international support for the resistance would certainly heighten Sihanouk's pessimism and shorten his time horizon. Diplomatically, this could take the form of a

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rapprochement between Vietnam and China, a breakdown in the Thai or ASEAN consensus backing the resistance, or a weakening in the CGDK's international standing at the UN. We do not expect Hanoi to have much success at eroding the CGDK's position at the UN General Assembly in October, but we believe there is a good possibility of gradual erosion in international support for the resistance. Sihanouk is almost certainly aware of Vietnamese boasts that the Cambodia problem will be solved by 1987--the year by which the Heng Samrin regime claims it will hold national elections with or without resistance participation. [redacted]

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#### Sihanouk's Bottom Line

If one or a combination of these developments convinces Sihanouk that the resistance's days are numbered, we believe there is a better than even chance that he would attempt to cut a deal with Hanoi--portraying it as part of a broader movement toward Cambodian national reconciliation. [redacted]

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[redacted] Sihanouk agreed in principle to accept an invitation to return if his supporters were given government positions and he were allowed to speak freely in public. [redacted]

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[redacted] we believe Sihanouk would be amenable to cutting a deal with the PRK--even in a figurehead position--if these minimum conditions were met. And of course he would also have to be assured of the flattery and deferential treatment he believes is owed him in recognition of the unique role he plays in Cambodia's destiny. [redacted]

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Will He Bolt?

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